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Many Latins Back Panama in Crisis

CARACAS (AP)—President Romulo Betancourt of Venezuela, one of Washington's friends, and a lot of other Latin Americans have taken Panama's side in the Canal Zone crisis.

The trend was not unanimous. But Cuban Communists were not alone in criticism of the United States.

A call for a full study by the council of the Organization of American States was voiced in Colombia, from which Panama was wrested by a U.S.-backed revolt in 1903. The liberal Bogota newspaper El Tiempo said:

"As fervent supporters of a policy of understanding and mutual respect with the United States, nevertheless we cannot help but declare that in this hour we are with the sister republic in her just and sovereign demands and fraternally with her in her sorrow."

Betancourt's government issued a communique expressing Venezuela's "fraternal adhesion to the Panama people and government."

U.S. Criticized

La Republica, unofficial newspaper of Betancourt's Democratic Action Party, said it would not be just to blame Washington directly for the Panamanian dead and wounded, but that the United States bears a serious responsibility "for maintaining a situation which has caused conflict for many years."

"All brother peoples of the Americas should energetically protest the brutal repression of the Yankee troops," it said, "and the inactivity of canal authorities in terms that will satisfy the dignity of both countries and avoid incidents such as the provoked by the conduct of the North American citizens."

The North American citizens to which La Republica referred were high school students who took part in a flag-raising at their school.

Brazil's government voiced hopes for a peaceful understanding on "a basis of mutual respect and esteem for the principle of legal equality between the two states."

The conservative O Estado de Sao Paulo declared "the control of the canal by the United States, though supported by law, can't resist much longer the pressure of moderate nationalism."

In Argentina, the independent Clarin of Buenos Aires, suggested the causes of the violence will be a factor in determination of the outcome.

If they fall into "a general trend in Latin America toward nationalism," it said, "the problem may be very serious. But if they fall exclusively within the local history, it is more than probable that a solution can be found soon."

A Peruvian view, presented by the conservative La Prensa of Lima, was that the United States should apologize to Panama because of the North American nationality of "the irresponsible youths who, certainly without realizing the consequences of their attitude, planted the seed of the incidents."

La Prensa also called on Panama to look into "the probable participation of Castro-Communist agitators on the Panamanian side."

Approval of steps toward peace was voiced by two independent newspapers in Ecuador.

El Comercio of Lima said, "we believe that Panama and the United States will overcome the disruptive situation in terms that will satisfy the dignity of both countries and the good understanding of the whole continent."

El Telegrafo of Guayaquil said an incident between students, acting with a vehemence natural in youth, "should not ever degenerate into the sorrowful events that the whole continent regrets."

Possible Precedent

Mexican reaction was reflected in two moderate editorials.

The independent conservative Excelsior saw one good symptom in the episode: "It could establish a precedent for the problems between a big power—The United States in this case—and a republic physically weak—Panama—to be resolved in a pacific way within the spirit and precepts of the OAS."

The independent Novedades remarked that the hostile relations "are the consequences of that piece of land that Panama rented to the United States for construction of the canal."

"But it is necessary to remember," it said, "that those obligations came from help that the North Americans gave to the Panamanians to gain their independence from Colombia and that the government of the new republic, a result of the Colombian division, subscribed to the commitments that now exist."